

# The Department of Religious Studies

# Religions of India Initiative

*presents*

## THE PAUL. A & MARIE CASTELFRANCO LECTURE

**Professor Corinne Dempsey**  
**Nazareth College**

*on*

**Friday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**6:00 PM**

**Putah Creek Lodge, UC Davis**

***Living under One Roof in Kerala, South India:  
Hindu-Christian Dialogue through Ritual and Narrative***

The southwestern state of Kerala, India's spice capital, houses a population that is approximately 25% Christian, 25% Muslim, and 50% Hindu. Kerala's religious diversity is ancient, as most Christians trace their origins to Thomas the Apostle who, according to tradition, arrived by spice boat soon after the end of Jesus' earthly career. Today, although divided into Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant branches, Kerala's Christians collectively take pride in their culturally assimilated, socially elite religious heritage. Based on her field research at Hindu and Christian pilgrimage and festival sites in central Kerala, Dempsey explores interreligious "dialogue" enacted on the ground, arising from long-term, largely peaceful coexistence between the two communities. Shared architecture and ritual practices support the proudly stated, often-heard saying: "We live like brothers and sisters in Kerala." Village folklore furthermore assigns sibling roles to church saints and temple deities. Depicting heavenly siblings as rivalrous yet reliant, these stories mirror the lived realities of earthly communities who, while facing the challenges of cohabitation, value cooperation above all else.



**Corinne Dempsey** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York. She received an M.A. from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, and a Ph.D. from Syracuse University. Her book, *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India*, features her work on Hindu-Christian ritual exchange in Kerala. In *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York*, Dempsey describes an innovative Hindu temple outside Rochester. Most recently, in *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth* she compares how Hindus and Christians use folklore, theology, sacred land, and spiritually adept bodies to offer access to the sacred. Her current adventures include a study of spirit healing and trance practices in Iceland. Dempsey is past president of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies. She regularly leads Nazareth students on three-week tours of Kerala, offering them firsthand exposure to its varieties of interreligious exchange.

*This event is free and open to the public.  
For further information contact Archana Venkatesan at  
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